

A HALF CENTURY LATER

by Vic Berecz



A Tribute to Joan on our 50th Anniversary.

Joan Margaret Marion Luhrs ... altogether too many names. Born in Brooklyn to immigrant parents. Spoke only German until she was four. Remembers the FBI searching her toy chest early in the war, because her mom was still an "enemy alien." Had to change names when she went to school ... there's only a handful of people left who still call her *Marion*.

At thirteen, decided Brooklyn wasn't the place for her. Convinced her dad to relocate his business and family to Connecticut. There, this cute, very bright, introspective but always smiling teenager met ... yours truly. Both active in church youth group, plus our families were neighbors. Good friends for a decade ... dated only occasionally ... in high school she was more interested in one of the other guys from our church.



Went off to Valpo ... I followed the next year. Fixed me up with sorority sisters on occasion, then moved on (as planned) to nursing school at Columbia. Stayed in touch ... double-dated in NYC one New Year's Eve (her boyfriend then was one of my fraternity brothers). Graduated the same year ... she went off to work at Denver Children's Hospital and I went off to teach at LuHi on Long Island.

A year later, both ended up home in Connecticut looking for jobs. But, something had changed. I guess we both were ready to settle down. Just before I started my new job at Sikorsky, I drove her to Hartford to get her Connecticut nursing license. We decided to go out for dinner there, a lovely old-fashioned Armenian restaurant named Agajanian's. From that moment, everything seemed to click ... six months later we were married. Came home from our honeymoon in St. Thomas to a wonderful place ... an upstairs apartment in an old two-family house beside the railroad tracks. But, it was OUR home.



Saved every penny of her salary, and in a year had a down payment for our first house. Bought a house in Fairfield while she was pregnant with Steve. Like most suburban women of the era, opted for the life of a stay-at-home mom. During the kids formative years, I was too involved with stuff at work, and probably didn't pull my weight at home. These were the years when her German frugality and tenacity really showed through! The kids brought out the best in her ... she was a great mom even when she broke her leg with two kids in diapers! There were some tough patches for her, especially in the kid's teenage years. The proof of her parenting skills shows in what great adults Steve and Kim are today.

The kids were in high school and we were facing big college tuition bills. It's back to work ... this time in a nursing home. Her joyous attitude rubbed off on everybody around her, she proved to be as good working with the elderly as raising kids. Halloween's were especially fun, though one client noted in all seriousness, "Dearie, you must do something about that hair." She rose through the ranks and ended up managing the nursing staff of a new Bridgeport facility. BTW – those years in the nursing homes did manage to pay all the tuition for both our children at good private colleges.





In the late 1980s, our lives started to change. Steve and Kim were gone ... there was light at the end of the tuition tunnel ... I'd pretty much "had it" with defense contracting. We did an adventurous two-year stint in the D.C. area and when we returned to Connecticut I moved to a less-stressful research job ... Joan took up income tax preparation. Lived in a beautiful new house in the woods. A first offer of early retirement got us thinking and planning. Couldn't refuse the second offer. Now we're both 55, kids are out on their own, no strings, and in a couple of years the decision was made. We'd become *SnowBirds!* ... Florida here we come!

Two condos, a lot of travel, and a lot of leisure time. I continued part-time teaching and got totally immersed in family history. Joan got involved the AARP Tax-Aide program. We both got more active at church. But, something was missing that we couldn't do anything about it. Both our kids approaching 40 and no grand-children! Then Jake came along. The other two boys soon followed and we became the doting grandparents we remain today. We both were overwhelmed with the pleasure the boys brought us ... without the tribulations of parenthood.



Joan weathered a serious health crisis a few months before "the Girls" were born. Our coterie of five beautiful grandchildren was now complete. But, more health problems ensued and for a while there, it seemed like we were going to lose her. I'm not sure what powered her long and arduous recovery ... there were lots of prayers, great doctors, nurses and physical therapists, and I hope I helped a little too. But, I suspect the unfinished business of her "bucket list" was also a factor. At the top of that list was, I'm sure, to shop the "pink side" of the Carter's outlet for Christmas dresses for the twins.

Since those difficult days more than four years ago, we've slowed down a lot. But, we're still able to travel between Florida and Connecticut with a lot of time in-between in the Carolinas. And, as we have the opportunity to see and be a part of those grandchildren's lives, we know we have been truly blessed. A loving family is without a doubt one of the greatest of God's many blessings.



OK ... it'll very soon be our "golden anniversary" and we still argue too much ... and on occasion that does end up in a shouting match. Even our grandson Marc told us not to holler at each other ... but that's not likely to change ... don't forget I'm stubborn and she's German! We have coffee mugs which say: "Mr. Right" and "Mrs. Always Right" ... needless to say, I bought them.

But, Joan, it's been fifty really good years ... thank you for putting up with me. We did good! Life with you is good! Here's hoping for a few more good years. And I'll always

Luv 'ya, Hon.